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ABSTRACT

This brief handout set begins with a scenario that has a teacher discover that one of the best students in the class is facing the breakup of her parent's marriage. The student thinks it is "all my fault." A fact sheet on divorce and its effects on children follows. Psychological and economic effects of divorce on children are listed. Facts about children and divorce are provided in a section entitled, "Did You Know?". Lists of ideas are provided under "How Can We as Teachers Help?" and "How Can Parents Help?" The section "The Children of Divorce - Teacher Connection" begins with a quotation from Chuck Norman, and some data are provided. The importance of providing stability for children is emphasized. A "Behavior Check List which Signals a Recent Divorce" is presented. (Contains six references.) (EMK)

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Torn Apart By Divorce

WHEN A FAMILY IS SHATTERED TO PIECES. . .

Gigi Conklin Brian Kamps Kate Lopez,
Christine McAlister and Cheri Wright

***Adapted from "Tending to the Emotional needs of Teachers and Children: Tricks of the Trade"**
Katherine L. Lauderdale,B.A., Jerry L. Roberson, B.A., and Carlos A. Bonilla, Ph.D. , Editors

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HOME
SWEET
HOME

TORN APART BY DIVORCE

SCENARIO

It is your sixth month of school and today you have already taken care of the rebellion from the poor and those who simply don't like to write. It is the journal writing class and your students accepted this daily assignment months ago. So, why should this particular day be any different? Because one of your better students decides to object to the journal topic and does so **STRONGLY**. You let it go thinking, "maybe the journal topic wasn't as good as I thought or maybe she is having a bad day."

After lunch, upon returning to class the student still appears in an uncharacteristic bad mood and rude to others. Why? At the end of the day important clues to the emerging problem slap you in the face: this student is hurting emotionally, the journal entry:

"Last night my mom and dad told me they were getting a divorce, I think it is all my fault!"

THE FACTS

It is almost the 21st. Century and divorce seems almost a natural outcome with couples who find it hard to get along. In fact, couples who are brave enough to venture into the world of marriage are at a 50% risk of winding up divorced. Unfortunately, many of them do so after having children. Simply stated, divorce affects children's welfare and the impact tends to be long-term.

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

Children just like anyone else, experience the five steps of grieving:

- **DENIAL**
- **ANGER**
- **BARGAINING**
- **DEPRESSION**
- **ACCEPTANCE**

Unfortunately, unlike adults, they are unable to express their emotions openly OR effectively. It may take children years to reach acceptance. Divorce, then, becomes the main event of their life, at the expense of learning. Some may go through the daily motions of schooling, Others become obsessed with trying to do everything right, while thoughts and fears of a changing life persist.

Divorce affects children:

- PSYCHOLOGICALLY:

  Some Take on guilt: had they been better, made their bed every day, not argued so much, daddy would not have left, others become angry and unable to fit in with their peers. Sometimes they grow up unable to have satisfying or trusting relationships with their partners.

- ECONOMICALLY:
  - Most children of divorce live with their mother.
  - The mother's income is usually drastically reduced. Sometimes there is not enough money to meed basic needs: food, clothing, expenses for extra curricular activities. they may be forced into the welfare system. When children reach high school age these can ave devastating effects.

Did you know?

- Many children of divorce become involved in drug and alcohol abuse, many before the age of fourteen.
- Many children become sexually active especially adolescents, particularly girls.
- More children of divorce drop out of high school than children with both parents in the home.
- Children of divorce sometimes have a harder time finding a job.
- Children of divorce are sometimes insufficiently supervised and poorly protected.
- Teens of divorce can be at risk of suicide, eating disorders and depression
- Divorced parents are less likely to send their children to collage even when they can afford it.

When all of these are taken into consideration the important question becomes: what can a teacher do?

HOW CAN WE AS TEACHERS, HELP?

- Let children go through the grieving process. This is something that is necessary.
- Validate the child's feelings and opinions, both negative and positive.
- Accentuate success, self-worth and build confidence
- Adjust explanations but maintain rules and guidelines, you can make certain allowances for the child.
- Confidentiality is a must.
- Lighten their guilt.
- Listen to their needs, try to hear their feelings.
- Start counseling even when the child shows reluctance. Advise the child to "just try it," of they don't like it they can quit after a few sessions.

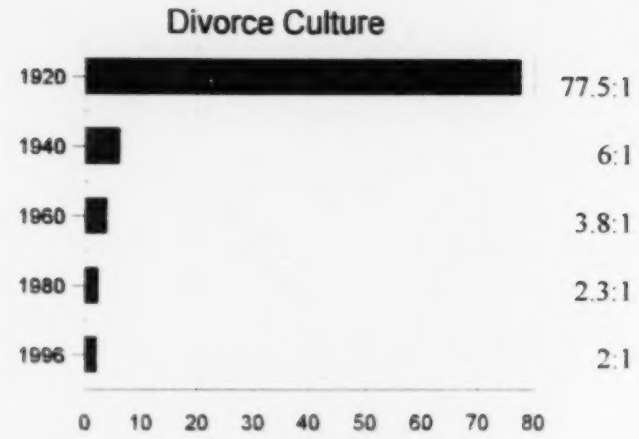
HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

- Let the child know the divorce is between the parents not the children.
- Explain that it is not their job to fix everything.
- Recognize there is a transition time between the divorce and the child's acceptance of the ie. The child has to go through the grieving process.
- Spend time with your child.
- Have dinner at the table with no TV; allow for open discussion of fears, concerns; ameliorate feelings of guilt.
- Try to keep changes to a minimum.
- Don't argue in front of your children.
- Try family counseling, or support groups.

THE CHILDREN OF DIVORCE-TEACHER CONNECTION

Teachers wear many hats in their classrooms, they are role models, counselors, friends, mother, father, psychologist, and when they have the time, teachers. Chuck Norman summed it up very well:

> ***" Teachers once were expected, first, to teach. No more. Today, that is far down on the job description. Now, we are expected to raise them, to impart to them some semblance of culture, to monitor their health, to provide therapy and counseling, to protect them from gangs and drugs, to feed them breakfast and lunch, to motivate them to work hard, to spark their curiosity and love learning, to entertain them, to foster their "self-esteem", and then, only if we have produced children who still care to be bothered, to teach them to read and write and do sums".***



Changing ratio of divorces through the decades.*

Number of divorces per 1,000 married women.*

Teachers may have themselves of the divorce equation and meeting the needs, of one or more of their students who are in the midst of the emotional turmoil caused by a broken home, can be very challenging. This effort takes maturity, caring, and knowledge of the problems, cause and effects, and solutions. Most teachers have all of these qualities

* USA Today, June 3, 1997

and are willing to help develop a well- adjusted child no matter how hard the job. The rewards are just too great to be ignored. Ennis Cosby spoke for a lot of teachers:

" I will teach things that are not in the books. For instance, I believe that children will be better students if they like each other better or if they like themselves better. I believe that stability starts inside and then reflects out of a person".

A child's stability does start from the inside and it is up to teachers and parents to provide a caring, protective, and anchored arena from which the jump into adulthood can be taken!!

BEHAVIOR CHECK LIST WHICH SIGNALS A RECENT DIVORCE

HAVE YOU NOTICED THE FOLLOWING CHANGE IN ANY OF YOUR STUDENTS?

- ☐ A CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR EVERY OTHER MONDAY FOLLOWING A NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTAL VISIT
- ☐ SADNESS, DEPRESSED, OR CRYING
- ☐ MOODY
- ☐ INATTENTIVE
- ☐ DAY DREAMING
- ☐ ANGER
- ☐ AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
- ☐ LONELINESS
- ☐ A CHANGE IN PERSONAL HYGIENE
- ☐ ATTENDANCE AND TARDINESS
- ☐ RADICAL CHANGE IN GRADES UP OR DOWN
- ☐ CHANGE IN SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND FRIENDS
- ☐ FINANCIAL HARDSHIP, BORROWING MONEY, NO LUNCH MONEY
- ☐ ACADEMIC OR BEHAVIORAL REGRESSION

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